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ABSTRACT

At a time of urban crisis, it becomes essential for people to learn about the special problems and needs of other people in the same community. If not actual experience, then visual experience through television can provide a good view into the perspective of other cultures. Television has an obligation to provide education of this sort, particularly for the ghetto child who has the intelligence and potential to learn, but is held back by our print-oriented educational process. The mass media must be convinced to provide a socializing situation for the child, and to provide the problems of the real world as the learning problem. Further, this sort of education or communication should be also intended for adults, both advantaged and disadvantaged, so that understanding will be increased. The first task, however, is to make a dent in the hopelessness that ghettoized Blacks--to bring some bit of reality, as opposed to the oft-broken promises, to the dream that there is some hope for their children. If television has shown the suburban promised land, it also seems necessary that television could show people how to reach that land. (SH)

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ADDRESS TO THE THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING
OF THE AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

August 9, 1967, American Hotel, New York City

"COMMUNICATIONS AND CRISIS"

by

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(The comments in this paper are Dr. Hilliard's as a private individual and do not necessarily reflect the endorsement or approval of the Federal Communications Commission or the Federal Interagency Broadcast Committee.)

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Robert L. Hilliard

I had intended to speak here today, for an overview of what is to come this morning, on the technological revolution that has taken place in the world and on the revolution that has not taken place in education; on a philosophy of pragmatism that has seen the developments in communications, transportation and energy create a new mode of living and thinking and on an existing philosophy and practice of education that has by and large continued to divorce itself from the real world and remain firmly fixed in the 19th century.

I had intended to stress, not as an ending point, but as a starting point, the concept that many of you have heard me present in recent speeches: that we must cease using educational technology to reinforce, to reflect outmoded educational curricula, technique and administration, and that wemust use the media to affect education, just as these media have affected the world outside of the classroom, including students and teachers. I had intended to list specific changes in education necessary for it to take full advantage of and give full measure to the world it is in.

In fact, I have that particular speech written. But I am not going to give it.

The events of the past several weeks have made it clear to me that any discussion of education and technology at this time has got to relate itself directly, sharply, unhesitatingly to the urgencies in our society, to a broad concept of education that is the here and now of the practical and not only the then and there of the theoretical.

I believe we must assess educational media, particularly television, not only for their critical importance, but also for their importance in times of crisis.

In making this speech change virtually at the last minute, just before coming to New York for this conference, I should say that my comments here today, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the position or endorsement of the Federal Communications Commission.

Newark, Detroit, Milwaukee, East Harlem are more important in revealing our failures and potentials in the field of education, in educational technology and in communications than are all the experiments and applications in industry and in the schools and colleges.

We must take a deep breath and give deep thought when we look at recent occurences. How desperate a person must be to be willing to destroy everything he has--including his very life! What hopelessness and despair force people to acts of self-destruction! What a tragic cry for help is an inward act of violence! What a forsaken wilderness of education and communication is revealed between the total society and large segments of its people!

Between the lines of hysteria and behind the pictures of fear two consistent points continue to appear: education and communications. A

number of Senators have linked the riots to educational deprivation. Senator Robert Kennedy said: "We pass bills and appropriate money and assuage our consciences, and local school systems keep right on doing things the way they've done them for decades." Senator Jacob Javits sees education as part of the solution to offset the "frustration, despair and anger" that "create the conditions which bring on the riots." Senator Wayne Morse stated that the racial unrest in urban areas was also due, in part, to "the educational starvation which the Negroes have suffered."

New York Mayor John Lindsay, following the disorders here a few weeks ago, noted that the appropriate agencies have not been able to "make contact" with the teenagers who made up most of the disorderly mobs. In Philadelphia a while ago--just before the sweep of riots--a high official of the school system told me of the threat of a riot, an attack upon a school in a so-called white neighborhood. The white people were the incipient rioters, objecting to the fact that a number of non-white children came into their area to attend that school. The white children of the community were part of the threatening mob. The difficulty, said the school official, was communication--to reach these white people with information and understanding to "cool them," and to help them learn responsibility.

In the domestic crisis of our time we come back, then, again and again, to these two interacting areas: education and communications. We come back to the need for some people to learn about the special problems and needs of other people, even in the same community. In an article in INTERCOM in January, 1967, Dr. Seymour Fersh stated: "The best way--though certainly not an infallible one--to learn about other peoples and cultures is by direct experience. The least effective way is by words because words themselves are a man-made product of one's own culture." This experience I think I may interpret as including communication of visual and aural experiences that are not verbal alone and, most important, including the psychological impact at the same time of the media in themselves, aside from content.

We have so much to do in so many formal education areas, those of us who are dedicated to the communications-transportation-energy revolution, that it may seem unfair to say that it is further incumbent upon us to use those means of communications in which we are expert to meet the needs and problems of those people who cry out verbally in despair and who act out physically in desperation; to meet the needs and problems of those who cry out in dismay and uncomprehension when they view the desperate reactions of many of their fellow citizens; in other words, to communicate between and among <u>all</u> the peoples of our country. Is there any reasonable alternative?

Recently I had the privilege of providing consultation in the planning of a program for one of our large city ghetto areas.

(I might, as an aside for a moment, comment on that word "ghetto." It is significant, I think, that it is the term "ghetto" that is being used more and more in newspapers and on radio and television. We used to call those areas slums. Now we use a term that refers to a group

deliberately isolated--the traditional concept of ghetto as developed in organized discrimination against the Jews in Europe throughout the centuries. Does it seem to you that the term "ghetto" is more descriptive and explanatory of what has happened and what is happening than is the word "slum"? Have you heard of poor whites living in ghettos? They live in slums.)

My plan for the inner-city (or ghetto) took into consideration the concept that has been put forth by many educators-sociologists-psychologists that thus far the compensatory education programs in this country have not effectively raised the level of learning of the children. (You may recall that this was a basic statement in the fine NET documentary on the Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, school experiment, "The Way It Is.")

Part of the reason for failure is that these programs have concentrated on the concept that this is a print world, that the student's orientation, intake and output is print, is reading. The child in Bedford-Stuyvesant says he doesn't find anything interesting in school. What he means is that he's bored because he can't read the book used as the core of instruction. We cannot teach him to read the book as we might teach children who have not suffered the psychologically destructive, deprived backgrounds of many of these children. We must first reach this child to motivate him toward the personal worth and confidence that will give him a base for being willing to learn. We must use those means to reach him to which he is already tuned in: radio and television. To continue to push print as the primary approach is to continue to create an ever concentric circle of stone walls surrounding the child. /Concomitantly, we must do away with the print oriented evaluations--really misevaluations--of the child: information-learning and information-testing./

Much has been said, particularly in relation to school integration, about the ability and readiness of the ghetto child to learn. Frequently, we offer conclusions about the ghetto child through intelligence test results. We find generally low IQs. All this shows is the fallacy and inadequacy of intelligence tests.

Outside of the school that child thinks, uses his mind. The child in the ghetto, just to survive, must make meaningful, effective judgments and decisions every moment of the day--and night. And this takes a kind of intelligence that most of us have not had to exercise. When talking about survival in the ghetto, it is not like the experience of most of our children playing in the back yard. It is an experience usually lacking the guidance of an adult. It requires an intelligence of a high practical order that is not reflected in the verbal oriented-cultural achievement evaluations we call IQ tests. It is the kind of ability many industry people say they are looking for, but have not yet really utilized.

The intelligence and potential are clearly there. They must be motivated and matured through communications and education. They must be communicated with and given an opportunity to communicate.

We must use the mass media to provide a socializing situation for the child, to make the real world a part of the classroom, to provide the problems of the real world as the learning problem; the solutions learned--or at least the understanding obtained--is what constitutes education. /Information regurgitated on examinations is not education. And we must recognize, too, that print is only a small part of the child's (and adult's) total daily communications existence./

The visual and aural input into the classroom must turn the classroom away from the classroom, must remove the four walls. We must bring in those experiences that are meaningful and those people who are meaningful. The terror of being put in a classroom surrounded by tasks that he cannot do and that have little meaning to his real world, being surrounded by white faces in suits and ties that drive out of the ghetto in cars every afternoon to another world--these are conditions that are unreal, that have no meaning, and it is incredible that anybody can be expected to learn anything under them.

What is true for the child in the classroom is, by projection, true for the adult in the apartment house or on the block. We have learned that the old ways do not work. The traditional methods of communicating with adults have failed again and again, in Detroit, in Newark, in Milwaukee.

The first task is not to organize a group to discuss housing problems, or to set up an unemployment opportunity office, or to create sidewalk colleges, or to bring in a task force of expert teachers to help children learn how to read.

The first task is to make a dent in the curtain of hopelessness that has been pulled down over every Negro child and adult, every Negro family, every Negro community that has been ghettoized into economic and cultural poverty.

To try to bring some bit of reality, as opposed to the oft-broken promises, to the dream--not deferred for these people, but shattered--that there is some hope for their children, if not for themselves.

Radio and television are the primary means of communication these people have with the outside world and therefore must be given a primary emphasis in any inner-city plan.

In my own mind I have no doubt that the daily and nightly electronic visions about all those families with pleasant homes and nice cars and well-dressed and well-fed kids makes a man very uncheerful about the two rooms his family shares with the rats.

If television has shown the ghetto man, woman and child the suburban promised land, does it not seem logical that television should go on from there and show them how to reach that land?

Presumably through education. And there's the rub! You may have seen the recent study which indicates that the educated Negro is often just as angry and just as ready to go along with violence as is the less well educated precisely because he has made the educational hurdle and is still barred from the economic promised land.

So, it is not enough for television to educate the disadvantaged. If domestic peace and justice are to be achieved, will television not also have to educate the rest of us to accept the practice of what we preach? If we really believe that education is the barrier, then once the disadvantaged are educated, we must be ready to break the barriers. We must educate the ghettos, yes, but we must also educate the suburbs. The people on the outside of the ghettos who still practice a TV kind of paternalism. How long do you think society can keep saying: "Look--- but don't touch!?

We are talking about television; and we are all of us tuned in. The Bible says that the child is father to the man. Freud said that what a man will be is determined by the time he is three years old. And the latest statistics say that two-year olds spend about 20 hour per week watching television.

We--all of us--need the education that television and the other electronic media can provide. Just as we want the people inside the ghetto to learn, those of us outside of it have also got to be ready to learn. For the many of us who have been emotionally raised in a world of platitudinous beliefs and verbal rationalizations it isn't going to be easy. But in realistic terms, for those who can't see it from any other point of view, I suspect that it beats having to choose between hiding out forever in the crab grass or risking a hole in the head to visit the art museum in the center of the city.